

The Present Needs of the Negro

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Principal Gate City Public School. At Clifton Conference,
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AS I stand here, with our hostess on my left and our host on the right, I feel that we are all here in this great meeting upon the Mount of Transfiguration, looking out into that great light that shall brighten as the day shall come for the uplift, for the training, for the teaching, for the making of better men and women — Christian men and Christian women — of the black boy and girl in the South, as the days and years shall come.



Prof. W. B. Matthews

God bless these good people. God bless you who have come here, you white brethren and black brethren, all of us, to plan for the work and to study how the southern man, and the white man of the North, and the Negro may unite their efforts to uplift and to elevate their black brother and to lift the great burden that is holding all of us down as we travel heavenward through the years.

The Advance of the Negro

Much has been said about the advance of the Negro. I want to speak briefly of some of the things that have been said. We have made great advance along church lines during the forty years of our emancipation. We have our great bishops, great church heads, and great publishing houses sending out their literature day by day, month by month, and year by year, to the Negro people throughout the South, helping to lift them. We have our great business enterprises among the Negroes, training them to be business men, training the Negroes to mental effort, and training them to unite their efforts to better their own conditions. We have our own physicians looking after our physical condition. We have secular newspapers, published weekly and monthly, and sent throughout the country for the uplift of our people mentally and morally. We have our homes. We are home builders. As some one has said, we are American citizens, and if some enemy should come to our shores, every

Negro would stand by the flag. Every Negro would protect this flag because it waves over his home.

The great mass of Negroes, however, are yet to be reached; and it is the purpose of this meeting to study, to lay plans whereby those of us who are able, may unite our efforts to reach that mass who are struggling for light and need our help so much. This is our mission and that is what we are doing.

The Amount of Self Help

One of the great things that encourages me is the amount of self help the Negro is putting forth. He ought to help himself. He wants to and does, and that is a great point of encouragement, for, after all, we must help ourselves and be able to stand for ourselves in all that is worth acquiring. We need encouragement, and we are getting it from this Conference, encouragement to do things and to help our brother as he ought to be helped.

Negroes who Live in Tenements

I want to speak of the home life of the Negro, the home life of the masses. The masses know nothing of home life. Throughout the South there is what is known as the tenement system. Rich white men build great tenements to be occupied by Negroes. They build these tenements without any regard as to sanitary conditions, without any regard for home life, without any regard for the sanctity of the great moral life. Negroes must live there. They are forced to do so by the cheap labor system. Men are compelled to live there for shelter. They foster criminals and from them come some of the worst types of the Negro we have.

Back of the school house in which I have been the principal for eighteen years, we have one of these tenement sections. Not a single week during these eighteen years have I failed to see the police officers in that section arresting somebody, hunting down and taking away somebody, for stealing, drinking or wife beating, or some other misdemeanor. The children of that community come to school and get into more disorder than the children from homes owned by our Negro people. They bring poorly prepared lessons. They come themselves poorly fed and dirty, and when we have disorder or bad language or mischief, or when we have found lying or stealing, it has originated among those children who come from the tenement districts. On various occasions I have asked my children, during little talks, about going to Sunday-school, and I have found there are no regular attendants of Sunday-school, that their mothers